

In 2014, public support for President François Hollande of the center-left Socialist Party (PS) fell to the lowest for a French president since World War II as France remained mired in economic stagnation and high unemployment. In January, Hollande announced a new economic policy of tax cuts for businesses and reductions in government spending, a sharp break from his party's traditional policies. On March 31, Hollande appointed a new prime minister from the right wing of the party, former interior minister Manuel Valls, who replaced Jean-Marc Ayrault. The reshuffle came in response to the Socialists suffering heavy losses in local elections in late March. Valls then dissolved the government in August following a clash with leftist economy minister Arnaud Montebourg, who publicly criticized Hollande's economic policies. Montebourg was excluded from the new cabinet, but Valls was reappointed prime minister.

The far-right, anti-immigration, and anti-European Union National Front (FN), led by Marine Le Pen, placed first in European Parliament (EP) elections in May, taking 26 percent of the vote in France. This marked an increase from 6.5 percent in the previous EP elections and was the party's best result in a nationwide election to date.

The government continued to confront challenges in the areas of national security, immigration, and ethnic diversity. A number of attacks against minority groups, including Roma, Jews, and Muslims, occurred throughout the year.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

### **Political Rights: 38 / 40** [\[Key\]](#)

#### **A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12**

The French president and members of the lower house of Parliament, the 577-seat National Assembly, are elected to five-year terms. The upper house, the 348-seat Senate, is an indirectly elected body whose members serve six-year terms. The prime minister is appointed by the president, who is elected by direct, universal suffrage in a two-round system. In the 2012 presidential election, Hollande won the first round with 28.6 percent of the vote, beating incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy of the UMP, who took 27.2 percent. Le Pen placed third, with 17.9 percent. Hollande won the election in a runoff against Sarkozy, with 51.6 percent of the vote to Sarkozy's 48.4 percent, becoming France's first Socialist president since François Mitterrand left office in 1995.

In 2012, the PS and its allies won an absolute majority of 314 seats in the National Assembly, while the UMP and its allies took 229 seats. In the September 2014 Senate elections, the PS lost its majority to the UMP and the center-right Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI), while the FN won two seats—its first ever in the upper chamber. The PS suffered substantial defeats in local elections in March 2014, with the UMP and FN both gaining at its expense.

#### **B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16**

Parties organize and compete on a free and fair basis. The center-left PS and the center-right UMP are the largest parties, though the far-right, anti-immigration FN receives significant support. Since taking over the

FN from her father in 2011, Le Pen has sought to give it a new image as a mainstream party. The UMP and the UDI made electoral gains against the PS in 2014.

The 2012 parliamentary elections yielded a record eight new members from immigrant backgrounds. However, they comprised less than 2 percent of the National Assembly, prompting renewed calls from minority rights groups for a law ensuring ethnic diversity in politics.

### **C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12**

In March 2014, newspaper *Le Monde* reported that investigators had wiretapped the telephones of Sarkozy, his lawyer, and two former ministers. The investigators were trying to discover whether Sarkozy had sought inside information from an appeals court judge about another investigation, into the financing of Sarkozy's 2007 presidential campaign. Former Libyan leader Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi allegedly had provided the campaign with as much as €50 million (\$68 million) in illegal funds. In July, police launched a formal investigation and detained Sarkozy for 15 hours of questioning, the first such action against a former president in modern French history. Sarkozy had allegedly sought to trade favors with a prosecutor, who was supposed to supply information about the campaign finance investigation in exchange for a job in Monaco. Sarkozy denounced the case as political manipulation.

In August, the French Court of Justice placed Christine Lagarde, the International Monetary Fund managing director and former finance minister for Sarkozy, under investigation for negligence in her decision to send a case involving businessman Bernard Tapie, a Sarkozy backer, to arbitration in 2007; Tapie won a multimillion-dollar arbitration payment in 2008, allegedly due to political connections.

Also in August, France joined the Open Government Partnership, a global initiative aimed at promoting transparency, accountability, and civic participation in government. France was ranked 26 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

### **Civil Liberties: 57 / 60**

### **D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16**

The media operate freely and represent a wide range of political opinions. Though an 1881 law forbids "offending" various personages, including the president and foreign heads of state, in practice the press is lively and critical.

While internet access is generally unrestricted, a domestic security law, which came into effect in 2011, allows the filtering of online content. A separate 2011 decree requires internet companies to provide user data, including passwords, to authorities if requested. In November 2014, a new counterterrorism law empowered authorities to block websites that incite or "glorify" terrorism.

The constitution protects freedom of religion. Strong antidefamation laws prohibit religiously motivated attacks, and Holocaust denial is illegal. France maintains the policy of *laïcité*, whereby religion and government affairs are strictly separated, though the government maintains relationships with organizations representing the three major religions in France (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism). A 2004 law bans "ostentatious" religious symbols in schools; Muslim girls' headscarves were widely seen as the main target of the law.

In January 2014, authorities in several French cities banned performances by comedian Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala, who had stirred controversy with anti-Semitic remarks and by popularizing a gesture known as the “quenelle,” which was widely seen as a Nazi-inspired salute. The Council of State, the nation’s highest administrative court, upheld the ban imposed by the city of Nantes. The comedian had six prior convictions for hate speech.-

In July 2014, the European Court of Human Rights upheld France’s ban on clothing that covers the face, including the burqa and niqab, in public spaces, ruling that the ban did not violate the European Convention on Human Rights. A French Muslim woman had brought the case, claiming that the ban was discriminatory and violated her freedoms of expression and religion. The ban had taken effect in 2011, the first of its kind in Europe. Violators can be fined up to €150 (\$220) or ordered to take citizenship lessons. A man who forces a woman to wear a niqab can be fined €30,000 (\$43,000).

Academic freedom is respected by French authorities, and private discussion is both open and vibrant.

## **E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12**

Freedoms of assembly and association are respected, and nongovernmental organizations can operate freely. In July, protests against Israel’s military offensive in the Gaza Strip led in some instances to attacks on Jewish synagogues and shops in Paris and its suburbs. Authorities banned several pro-Palestinian protests, but some went ahead anyway.

Trade union organizations are strong despite fractionalization, declining density of membership, and a lack of legal protections relative to more corporatist European countries. In September, Air France pilots went on strike for two weeks to protest French-Dutch operator Air France-KLM’s plans to expand its budget brand, Transavia, which would pay its pilots less. Prime Minister Valls criticized the strike and rejected the pilots’ demand for mediation; the French government owns 16 percent of the airline.

## **F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16**

France has an independent judiciary, and the rule of law is firmly established. Prisons are overcrowded, and suicides in prison are common. The country’s antiterrorism campaign has included surveillance of mosques, and terrorism suspects can be detained for up to four days without charge. Concerned about French jihadists fighting abroad and then returning to commit terrorist acts in France, authorities had begun prosecuting suspects for offenses including planned travel to Syria. In the first such case, three Muslim men from the Paris metropolitan area who had been arrested in 2012 as they boarded a flight to Gaziantep, a city in Turkey near the Syrian border, received prison sentences in March 2014 ranging from two to five years. They were convicted on charges of criminal association with intent to commit terrorist acts. The November counterterrorism law imposed a travel ban on anyone suspected of planning to become a jihadist; under the law, suspects’ passports can be confiscated for six months to two years. On November 6, Hollande stated that about 1,000 French jihadists were currently fighting in Iraq and Syria, traveling to do so, or returning to France from doing so.

In June 2014, the leading Corsican separatist group, the National Liberation Front of Corsica, said it would end its decades-long armed campaign for independence, having “unilaterally decided to begin a process of demilitarization.” In 2001, the government devolved some legislative powers to the island and allowed

teaching in the Corsican language in public schools.

French law forbids the categorization of people according to ethnic origin, and no official statistics are collected on ethnicity. Minorities are underrepresented in leadership positions in both the private and public sectors.

In 2013, France reportedly deported a record 19,380 Roma, up from about 9,400 in 2012 and 6,400 in 2011. This marks a sharp increase under Hollande, who previously criticized Sarkozy for such expulsions. In June 2014, a gang beating in a Paris suburb left a 17-year-old Roma boy in a coma. He allegedly burglarized apartments in the gang's housing project. Police made no arrests, and residents of the local Roma camp fled after the incident.

A national human rights commission has reported constant and pervasive discrimination, attacks, and threats against Roma and Muslims in recent years. Discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited by law.

## **G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16**

There are no restrictions on freedom of travel or choice of residence or employment. Private business is free to operate.

Gender equality is protected in France, and constitutional reforms in 2008 institutionalized economic and social equality. In August 2014, the National Assembly passed a new law aimed at increasing gender equality in the workplace, strengthening women's reproductive rights, and expanding protections for victims of domestic abuse. However, in the 2014 Global Gender Gap report, France ranked 126 out of 142 countries in terms of perceptions of the wage gap between women and men. Some electoral lists require the alternation of candidates by gender. After the 2012 elections, women held a record 27 percent of seats in the National Assembly.

In 2013, France became the 14th nation in the world, and the ninth in Europe, to legalize gay marriage.

In June 2014, the Council of State ruled that doctors could allow Vincent Lambert, a 38-year-old man in a vegetative state since a 2008 car accident, to die by removing his feeding tube. His parents, devout Roman Catholics, opposed the step and appealed to the European Court of Human Rights; his wife supported the doctors. Although France has not explicitly legalized euthanasia, a 2005 law gives doctors broad discretion over end-of-life decisions.

Civil right groups and academic studies have reported evidence of labor market discrimination against French Muslims and immigrants of North African decent, reflected in hiring patterns and income differentials.

### **Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)**

**X = Score Received**

**Y = Best Possible Score**

**Z = Change from Previous Year**

**[Full Methodology](#)**